

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 641  
By Brooks

A RESOLUTION to recognize and congratulate WDIA for 50 years of meritorious service to the greater Memphis community.

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the members of this General Assembly should recognize those exemplary radio stations that serve as beacons of public service in their respective communities and continually endeavor to provide both entertainment and information to the citizens of our state; and

WHEREAS, WDIA Radio of Memphis, the station of many firsts, is entering its 50<sup>th</sup> year of broadcasting excellence as Shelby County's first and foremost black formatted radio station; and

WHEREAS, with a decision made with sheer business savvy, owners John R. Pepper and Bert Ferguson, turned WDIA, then an ailing radio station, into a station that would forever change the history of radio broadcasting across the country; and

WHEREAS, WDIA was the first radio station in the country with a format designed exclusively for a black audience and the first station south of the Mason-Dixon line to air a publicly recognized black disc jockey, Nat D. Williams, a local well-known educator and showman; and

WHEREAS, in 1948, WDIA became the voice of the black community and a "starmaking" station in the mid south; stars such as B.B. King and Bobby Blue Bland began

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advertising their engagements at local clubs and Elvis Presley appeared at their hugely successful benefit “Revues”. Other local stars, such as Rufus Thomas (who is celebrating his 45<sup>th</sup> year at WDIA), Dwight “Gatemouth” Moore, and Maurice “Hot Rod” Hulbert received their start as disc jockeys during that time; and

WHEREAS, as WDIA’s notoriety grew in the community so did the span of its radio audience; it became the first black station to broadcast at 50,000 watts, the first Memphis station to gross a million dollars a year, and the first station in the country to present an open forum to discuss racial issues; and

WHEREAS, widely renowned as the “Goodwill Station”, WDIA has dedicated its resources to providing quality programming that encompasses a broad spectrum of entertainment and information; and

WHEREAS, the station represents the voice of the people in the community by providing a valuable public forum in which listeners may voice their opinions regarding various issues; and

WHEREAS, throughout the years, WDIA has maintained the unfaltering trust of the Memphis community, especially during times of crisis and upheaval in America, including The Korean War, The Kennedy assassinations, the loss of Medgar Evers, Malcolm X and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., boycotts, anti-war marches, Vietnam, Watergate, inflation, and recession; and

WHEREAS, after 50 years of superlative programming and remarkable growth, it is certainly appropriate that this General Assembly should honor WDIA and the station’s entire staff and join with them as they celebrate this significant milestone in the station’s history; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE

CONCURRING, That we do hereby congratulate and honor WDIA Radio on their 50<sup>th</sup> year of operation and thank the station's employees for their exemplary service to Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.